

Zoos Connect Us to the Natural World^G

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G ARGUMENT

You can often identify the writer's **claim** by reading the title. What do you think this opinion piece will argue?

The scene of Little Joe, the curious young gorilla out of his zoo exhibit wandering through Franklin Park,¹ certainly sold papers last month. But less well covered was the very real success that our nation's best zoos have had in nurturing the animals who live within their walls.

At the turn of the last century, 10 gorillas—these strange, human-like creatures from “darkest Africa”—still flourished in the wild and thoroughly captivated the American public. But once relocated from their jungle habitat, gorillas **languished**. Zoos found it impossible to keep the animals alive for more than a few weeks since little was known about the 20 natural history of gorillas. Even as late as the 1960s and '70s, most zoo gorillas were kept singly or in pairs in small, sterile concrete and tile cages and fed inappropriate foods. But things began to change as information from field and zoo biologists brought more understanding of both the

physiological and psychological 30 needs of these remarkable creatures.

Gorillas in today's zoos are typically kept in large, naturalistic exhibits, maintained in appropriate social groupings, fed nutritionally appropriate diets, and provided with excellent veterinary care. The result is that zoo gorillas exhibit behavior similar to their wild **counterparts**, 40 reproduce consistently, and live longer on average than they do in nature. **H**

In fact, recent advances in exhibit design, animal nutrition, genetic management, and veterinary medicine have revolutionized animal welfare and care in our zoos. Today, more than 90 percent of mammals housed 50 in accredited² facilities were born in zoos and not taken from the wild. They are under the charge of animal curators and caretakers who are trained professionals, with both academic and practical experience. Furthermore, accredited zoos have

languish (läng'gwīsh)
v. to lose strength and vitality

counterpart
(koun'tər-pärt') *n.* one that has the same functions and traits as another

H FACT AND OPINION

Reread lines 32–42. Can this information be verified? Once you decide whether this statement is a fact or opinion, add it to your chart.

1. **Franklin Park:** a Boston, Massachusetts, park that has a zoo in it.

2. **accredited** (ə-krĕd'īt-əd): meeting certain standards that have been set by a respected authority (in this case, the American Zoo and Aquarium Association).



ANALYZE VISUALS

What **conclusions** can you draw about the impact this encounter might have on the girl?

become “learning organizations” that constantly strive to improve the lives and health of the animals in their care. ❶

So why should we have gorillas or any other wild animals in zoos today? Before speculating about the role of these institutions in contemporary society, I must first draw a distinction between accredited zoos and other kinds of facilities that keep wild animals for public display. All of my statements are focused exclusively on the 213 facilities accredited by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association. AZA members undergo a detailed peer-review³ process, which is more comprehensive than existing local, state, or federal regulations.

At a time when children learn more about the world around them

from television and computers than from personal experience, modern zoos—and aquariums, for that matter—offer fun, safe opportunities to view living wild animals up close and personal. In 2002, over 140 million people visited AZA zoos and aquariums, more than attended all professional baseball, football, basketball, and ice hockey games combined. Modern zoological parks provide us a wonderful opportunity to build awareness and appreciation of wildlife in an increasingly urbanized populace—a group that is becoming progressively disconnected from the natural world. ❷

Only a small percentage of our nation’s citizens can afford to travel to **exotic** locations to view wild tigers, elephants, or giant pandas

❶ ARGUMENT

What criticisms is the author addressing in this paragraph? Paraphrase his **counterargument**.

❷ ARGUMENT

Reread lines 77–96. Which sentence provides support for the author’s **claim**? Which is a restatement of his claim?

exotic (ĭg-zŏt’ĭk) *adj.*
foreign; unusual; exciting

3. **peer-review**: evaluation by equals (in this case, other zoo officials).

K FACT AND OPINION

Reread lines 102–108.

How would you verify this information?

L FACT AND OPINION

Find one statement of fact and one opinion in this paragraph.

exploit (ěk'sploit') v. to use for selfish purposes

M ARGUMENT

What opposing viewpoint does the author present? What is his counterargument?

or to dive with sharks or moray eels. Zoos provide exhilarating experiences that can't be replicated on two-dimensional television or computer screens. Seeing, smelling, and in some cases even touching real, live animals is a powerful experience. **K**

The best zoos include
110 conservation, education, and science among their core missions,⁴ and the animals in their collections can be viewed as ambassadors for their counterparts in the wild. Many species are endangered or threatened and would have little chance of survival without human intervention. Increasingly, zoos are playing an important role in those efforts. Last year alone, AZA
120 member institutions supported 1,400 field conservation⁵ and associated educational and scientific projects in over 80 countries worldwide. These ranged from restoring habitat for endangered Karner blue butterflies⁶ in Ohio to attempting to curb the illegal, commercial
130 harvest of wildlife for meat in Africa to rehabilitating injured marine mammals and sea turtles and returning them to the sea. **L**

Some critics have characterized zoos and aquariums as “**exploiting**” animals for personal financial gain, but that's not true of the

professionals I know. As a curatorial intern at New York's Bronx Zoo/
140 Wildlife Conservation Society in the late 1980s, I went on rounds with the staff veterinarians as they cared for sick and injured animals. They worked long hours for comparatively little pay, and their dedication was inspiring. I also witnessed animal keepers weeping over the loss of their favorite animals and spending their own money to attend training programs to improve their knowledge and skills. **M**

In my opinion, a society that values wildlife and nature should support our best zoos and aquariums. Habitat conservation is the key to saving endangered species, and professionally managed zoos and aquariums and their expert, dedicated staffs play
160 a vital role by supporting on-the-ground conservation efforts and by encouraging people to care for and learn about wildlife and nature.

Zoos and aquariums are reinventing themselves, but while many are in the process of rebuilding their aging infrastructures, still others retain vestiges of the past or have been hit
170 hard by recent state or local budget cuts. Good zoos and aquariums are invaluable community assets, and they deserve our attention and enthusiastic support.

4. **core missions:** central goals and beliefs.

5. **field conservation:** conservation of wild organisms in their natural habitats (not in zoos).

6. **Karner blue butterflies:** endangered butterflies of the northern U.S. and Canada.